



### 132 Thomas John (Tom) Thomson

OSA 1877 – 1917

#### Canoe Lake, Algonquin Park

oil on canvas on board, on verso inscribed *Canoe Lake / 1914 / Algonquin Park / T. Thomson / South Shore of Canoe Lake, Algonquin Park*, circa 1914  
8 ¾ x 10 ½ in, 22.2 x 26.7 cm

#### PROVENANCE

A gift from the Artist to Harry A. “Bud” Callighen,  
park ranger, Algonquin Park  
Galerie Walter Klinkhoff Inc., Montreal  
The Art Emporium, Vancouver, August 3, 1973

Private Collection, Toronto  
*Canadian Art*, Joyner Fine Art Inc., Toronto,  
November 20, 1998, lot 53  
Private Collection, Toronto  
*Fine Canadian Art*, Heffel Fine Art Auction House,  
November 14, 2002, lot 85  
Private Collection, Toronto  
*Fine Canadian Art*, Heffel Fine Art Auction House,  
November 24, 2005, lot 151, sold as *South Shore  
of Canoe Lake, Algonquin Park*  
The Art Emporium, Vancouver, 2005  
Acquired from the above by the present Private  
Collection, British Columbia

TOM THOMSON’S *Canoe Lake, Algonquin Park* is a subtle revelation of springtime in Canada. The magic is in the detail: the birches that catch the light, with red in the top branches, the sweep of lighter sky amid the grey, the green grass, the purple undergrowth and the touches of turquoise in the grey lake waters. It is a typical Canadian day marking the transition from winter into spring. Thomson painted it just as he saw it, knowing not every day could be good weather. Yet there is something uplifting about the sketch too, something which makes it an enduring symbol of the Canadian North at the beginning of spring because Thomson knew what he was about as he portrayed the seasons and weathers of Algonquin Park. He knew that what he was setting down was an image that in time would speak to the whole country as he and his friends established a new landscape tradition. Our Canada, strong and free and cold but with the promise of better weather, has never been better described than here.

Thomson was joined in May of 1914 in Algonquin Park by British-born Arthur Lismer, with whom he had been friendly ever since Lismer joined the commercial art firm of Grip Ltd., where Thomson worked, around 1911. The two men camped and canoed on Canoe Lake and beyond to Smoke Lake and Ragged Lake, Crown and Wolf Lakes in the southwest of Algonquin Park. With Lismer’s encouragement and stimulation, and his keen appreciation of his painting, Thomson’s work gained in vigour and technical mastery. In spring 1914, Thomson used his 1913 theme of distant hills seen from the opposite shore but with greater attention to the time of year, on a trip Lismer rapturously described as a “wonderful time when everything was on the very edge of rebirth.”

Shortly after his return, Lismer wrote about the trip in detail:

We were there just after the ice had gone out of the lakes & before it had completely gone from the south slopes of the shores of the lakes. We were there before the maple & birch burst into leaf & we stayed to see the wonderful miracle of a northern spring come again. We were there when the first spring flower came up, and bravely faced the frosty nights & chilly mornings ...

Lismer found the northern change of seasons a revelation, one of the “wonders of God’s creation.” He further wrote, “Never have I appreciated the big idea of Spring before so strongly.”<sup>1</sup>

Thomson gave *Canoe Lake, Algonquin Park* to Algonquin Park forest ranger Harry “Bud” Callighen, whom he had known since 1912 and his first visit to the park.<sup>2</sup> Callighen was the ranger stationed at Smoke Lake.<sup>3</sup> Thomson gave Callighen an earlier sketch of Smoke Lake as well.<sup>4</sup> The first biographer of Thomson, Blodwen Davies, called Callighen a “good woodsman.”<sup>5</sup> Thomson would have admired such men for their campcraft and naturalist’s knowledge and enjoyed giving them views of the places they knew well.

Walter Klinkhoff in Montreal, the doyen of Canadian art dealers, acquired this sketch from Callighen and then sold it to the Art Emporium in Vancouver, Torben V. Kristiansen’s firm. After various owners and auctions, Kristiansen acquired it for a second time before selling it to a collector in British Columbia.



Arthur Lismer and Tom Thomson, Smoke Lake, Algonquin Park, May 1914  
Photo: H.A. Callighen  
McMichael Canadian Art Collection Archives

Kristiansen must have valued *Canoe Lake, Algonquin Park*’s stark simplicity and strength and probably found it a real tussle to part with it. Doubtless, if he were still alive, he would buy it again because he loved to own pictures of quality in Canadian art.

We thank Joan Murray, former curator of Canadian art and chief curator (1972) at the Art Gallery of Ontario, for contributing the above essay. Murray helped to bring the paintings of Tom Thomson to world attention through a series of exhibitions and seven books, including a biography (the most recent is *A Treasury of Tom Thomson*). Murray is the author of the *Tom Thomson Catalogue Raisonné*.

This work is included in the Tom Thomson catalogue raisonné, researched and written by Murray, as catalogue #1914.09: <https://www.tomthomsoncatalogue.org/catalogue/entry.php?id=183>.

1. Arthur Lismer, “Algonquin Park First Impressions,” May 1914, manuscript, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg.
2. See Callighen’s and fellow ranger Mark Robinson’s diary entries from May 18, 1912, Algonquin Park Archives, discussed in an article prepared by the Friends of Algonquin Park, “Tom Thomson’s First Algonquin Park Visit—May 1912,” available at [https://www.algonquinpark.on.ca/news/2012/2012-06-11\\_tom\\_thomson\\_first\\_algonquin\\_visit.php](https://www.algonquinpark.on.ca/news/2012/2012-06-11_tom_thomson_first_algonquin_visit.php).
3. Charles C. Hill, “Tom Thomson: Painter,” in *Tom Thomson*, ed. Dennis Reid (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2002), 118.
4. The 1912 *Smoke Lake, Algonquin Park* (cat. rais. 1912.11) is reproduced in Reid, *Tom Thomson*, 156, plate 4.
5. Blodwen Davies, *A Study of Tom Thomson: The Story of a Man Who Looked for Beauty and for Truth in the Wilderness* (Toronto: Discus Press, 1935), 75.

**ESTIMATE: \$800,000 – 1,000,000**